DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 016 UD 026 112

AUTHOR Golden, John G.
TITLE Assimilation or Biculturalism--Which Way To Adapt to American Life?
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Asian and Pacific American Education (Denver, CO, April 7-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; *Biculturalism; Cross Cultural Studies; *Ethnicity; High Schools; *High School Students; *Korean Americans; *Korean Culture; Minority Groups; *Peer Acceptance; Self Concept; United States History

ABSTRACT

Unlike previous immigrants, many of today's immigrants to the United States are accustomed to American culture since it has permeated the world and has settled into many international cities. An old concept of acculturation saw poor, ignorant immigrants arriving in America and immediately shedding their culture. Now acculturation has become more personalized and individualized. Immigrants have personalized adaptations to the process and much of this involves becoming bicultural. Biculturalism seems to produce less stress than acculturation. The process is exemplified by a study of Korean American high school students who were high achievers and had many friends among their American counterparts, but who remained deeply interested in their native language and history. They had positive outlooks and were interested in pursuing higher education. Their biculturalism was a better approach than acculturation since it led to more positive outcomes and self-concept. (VM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John G. Golden
Aurora Public Schools

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

4-19-88

ED296016

ASSIMILATION OR BICULTURALISM - WHICH WAY TO ADAPT TO AMERICAN LIFE?

Abstract

The process of acculturation has become more personalized and individualized. The linear idea of acculturation as moving from ethnicity to assimilation has been gradually replaced by types of individuals adapting to the acculturation process especially in a bicultural way. Recent studies show that assimilation seems to be accompanied by conflict and crisis for immigrants while biculturalism seems to produce less acculturative stress. An example of this is shown in a study of Korean-American high school students in Colorado who exemplify the benefits of biculturalism in the acculturation process.

Introduction

The technological changes taking place in the world today are making immigrants of us all. The third wave civilization is made up of minorities (Toffler, 1980). Today's technological revolution or third wave, as Toffler pictures it, is bringing about the closing of factories in the United States and their relocation in third world countries. It is setting up a web of mass telecommunications with satellites spinning around in space enabling millions of people all over the world to communicate instantly by telephone, television, computers, monitors and typewriters. Aircraft are being designed to whisk passengers from Washington to Tokyo in two hours. Computers are portable and are now in the hands of children as they learn how to read as they write and play games as they learn.

Unlike immigrants of old, many of today's immigrants to the United States are accustomed to the American culture since it has permeated the world and has settled into many international cities. American commercialism, American clothes, fast food stores, and the flashy way of life with bright lights, cars and disco music have extended to the far recesses of the world. No longer does the immigrant get off the boat after weeks of sea sickness with baggy clothes and no education. Now the immigrant gets off a large Boeing 747 after only a few hours of travel, wearing the latest fashions from Europe and sporting educational degrees.

The old concept of acculturation which saw the poor, lowly, ignorant immigrant arriving in America and immediately beginning to shed items of old, backward culture and replacing them with the advanced modern new culture, no longer fits. The poor still manage to get into the promised land but the educated "brain drain" from other countries have a better chance. The poor are often being loaded on busses and deported across the border.

UD026112

What is acculturation?

Traditionally, social scientists viewed acculturation as a linear movement in which cultural groups in contact ultimately fused to produce one culture which was that of the dominant culture (Herskovits, 1938; Linton, 1940). The Social Science Research Council (1954) defined acculturation, "as culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two of more autonomous cultural systems" (20).

Gordon (1964) clarified the concept of acculturation by relating it to assimilation. Acculturation he defined as cultural assimilation. Cultural assimilation refers to the change of an immigrant's cultural patterns to those of the host society. This is distinguished from social or structural assimilation which refers to the large scale entrance into cliques, clubs and institutions of the host society, on the primary level. Unlike acculturation, social assimilation requires acceptance of the immigrant group by the dominant group. This distinction was a breakthrough in better understanding acculturation. The majority group favors acculturation which is cultural assimilation but rejects social assimilation. In reality, the majority group wants the minority groups to have responsibilities but not rights in society. The "melting pot" according to Gordon (1964) was only an illusion.

Newman (1973) claimed that the reason the theories of acculturation failed was that they assumed all minority groups moved in a single, linear, assimilative direction. Basing his theory on a dynamic rather than static view of society, he pointed out that participation of the minority group in the dominant group's institutions did not foster assimilation if the minority group remained at the very bottom of those institutions. Further, there were situations where groups had reward parity but wished to remain segregated, such as many Asian-Americans, Hasidic Jews, Amish, Mennonites, Quakers as well as others, in order to preserve a life-style of values viewed as better than those of the majority group.

But even before Newman, many social scientists began to focus on individual and personal response instead of groups in the acculturation process. It soon became apparent that various heterogeneous types of individuals resulted from the process of acculturation (Child, 1943; Dohrenwend and Smith, 1962; Spindler and Spindler, 1957; McFee, 1972; Clark et al., 1976; Padilla, 1980; Hurh, 1980). Berry (1980a) used the model of adaptation to list three and possibly four main possibilities resulting from the process of acculturation: assimilation, integration, rejection and deculturation. Thus, some people gave up their native culture and language to become assimilated and American. Others refused to give up the old ways and rejected the American

ways. While others integrated the new with the old. Finally, some just went their own way alone.

After interviewing 381 Mexican-Americans, Padilla (1980) produced five well-defined homogenous types of individuals in the acculturation process. Padilla made an important discovery. He found a relatively large number of educated individuals to be bicultural. These individuals had acculturated to a sufficient extent to be able to function within the mainstream society, but at the same time they had not moved away from their culture of origin in either cultural awareness or ethnic loyalty. This was a discovery since most authors usually studied either one or the other extreme of the acculturation continuum - the assimilated or the non-assimilated. Few had focused on the biculturals (McFee: 1968).

In a study by Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) it was found that young Cuban males assimilated more rapidly to the American culture than older Cuban females and this was accompanied by conflicts in the family and high drug addiction. Bilingual Cuban students, however, did not seem to have these problems and were considered by their teachers to be better adjusted than non-bilingual students. This study along with Padilla's brought out the importance of biculturalism.

Hurh and Kim (1984) in their study of Korean Immigrants in the United States called this process "adhesive adaptation." They claimed that the Korean immigrants are:

> . . . assimilated both culturally and socially, but to a limited extent (especially in social dimension), and such assimilation would not replace or weaken any significant aspect of Korean traditional culture and social networks. If this is true, the Korean immigrants' adhesive mode of adaptation would be far from a zero-sum model of "assimilation," the term which has largely been synonymous with `Anglo-conformity' in the United States . . . (1984:190).

For the Koreans as well as for other immigrant groups, what is involved is people living, working, thinking and speaking in two distinct cultures. To use a generic term we could call it biculturalism. Biculturalism includes language along with identity, personal behavior, social behavior and other attributes (Berry, 1980a; 1980b). Essentially, it involves accepting or functioning in two distinct cultures as opposed to rejecting one culture for another (Cummins, 1984; Ventriglia, 1982; Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Kim, 1980). Biculturalism is distinct from bilingualism since language is only one but very important ingredient of biculturalism.

Although assimilation and ethnicity are at the extreme ends of a continuum they are both monocultural types of reactions to

acculturation. Biculturalism, on the other hand, instead of choosing one or the other, embraces both cultures or both groups. It may be this openness or acceptance to different cultures as opposed to the closed or nonacceptance of other cultures of monoculturalism which explains the different kinds of reactions to acculturation.

These studies bring into question the hypothesis that highly culturally assimilated individuals are better adjusted than other types of immigrants who are in the process of acculturation. In these studies it was the bilingual and presumably the bicultural person who was better adjusted.

Bok Lim Kim (1980) found problems in her study of Korean-American youth who were highly culturally assimilated. These students had an identity crisis, "Am I a Korean or an American?" and seemed to be headed toward negative marginality. She saw only two possibilities open to her son's dilemma as well as to the other 50,000 Korean-American children in the United States in 1980. One was to develop a bicultural identity and the other to "fall" into a state of marginality.

Cummins (1984) in exploring the "myth of bilingual handicap," stated that before the 1960's, children were pressured to reject the home culture in order to belong to the majority culture and were punished for speaking their native language as well as made to feel ashamed of their own language and cultural background, they usually ended up unable to identify fully with either cultural group and did poorly in school. But the success of the Canadian immersion programs where children performed better than comparison groups in some academic and cognitive skills and a positive association was found between bilingualism and aspects of both cognitive flexibility and divergent or creative thinking abilities, changed this.

Lin and Standford (1983) found that almost all Chinese-Canadian parents (92%) expressed the belief that a bilingual experience may have a positive influence on their children's intellectual development and, "it is more congenial for immigrants to acculturate while retaining their culture rather than to assimilate into the host society through de-ethnization" (51).

Warning about the dangers of too rapid assimilation, Stonequist stated:

> Perhaps the finest citizens of foreign origin are those who have been able to preserve the best in their ancestral heritages while reaching out for the best that America could offer. They have been able to create a balance between continuity and change, and so have maintained reasonably stable characters" (1937:206).

Gordon wrote:

> The challenge for social welfare agencies and institutions in the immigration field is, without mounting a doomed effort to stem the inevitable tide of American acculturation, to aid the second-generation child to gain a realistic degree of positive regard for the cultural values of his ethnic background, which will hardly retard the acculturation process, but which will give the child a healthier psychological base for his confrontation with American culture and for his sense of identification with and response to his parents (1964:244-5).

Study of Korean-American Students

In a study conducted by the University of Colorado at Boulder (Golden:1987) the benefit of biculturalism in the acculturation process was verified. The data for this study was obtained by interviewing 80 Korean-American high school students in a suburb of Denver, Colorado. This population was chosen because of the high number of recent immigrants to the area who were in the process of acculturation.

The interviews consisted of a questionnaire which contained Osgood's semantic differential including 4 semantic scales of 27 items each. The questionnaire was administered to the Korean-American high school students at home, at meeting places and at school.

The semantic differential (Osgood et al., 1957) seemed highly applicable to the process of acculturation especially since both negative and positive aspects of the process were analyzed.

The scales were formed by rating individual items on various concepts. In this study, four concepts were used as a stimulus for responses on the seven-step scale. These were:

1. SELF CONCEPT ("I AM USUALLY. . .")
2. IDEAL CONCEPT ("I WOULD LIKE TO BE. . .")
3. KOREAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS
4. WHITE AMERICAN STUDENTS

The questionnaire revealed that 90% of these students were immigrants and almost half were in the United States for 6 year or less. Despite their short stay 80% understood and spoke both English and Korean. Over half read in both languages (53%) but most read American media and watched American TV (64%).

Over half considered themselves Korean (54%). Eighteen percent felt left out or isolated with white Americans while 33% felt left out or isolated with Koreans.

Osgood's differential revealed much about their reactions to the acculturation process. The following tables present the highest means on the four concepts. Since a score of 4 indicates a neutral relationship between items and concepts, scores 4.99 and below were not presented. Seven is the highest possible score indicating the strongest relationship. The following table shows how these students felt about themselves and what their ideals were:

Table 1 Fourteen Highest Means on Items for All Respondents on Self and Ideal Concepts

SELF		IDEAL	
Items	M	Items	M
respectful	5.85	hardworking	6.69
honest	5.79	smart	6.66
friendly	5.77	happy	6.65
polite	5.75	friendly	6.64
dependable	5.67	honest	6.50
positive	5.59	respectful	6.44
smart	5.52	strong	6.43
active	5.44	brave	6.38
happy	5.39	polite	6.35
urban	5.32	positive	6.33
strong	5.20	careful	6.31
motivated	5.13	dependable	6.22
unprejudiced	5.07	popular	6.17
stable	5.00	free	6.16

The fourteen items on self are all above 4.99. Since there were only a total of 27 items, these student averages on the items were over half on the positive side. The rest were all in the neutral position except for one at 3.96 which was cooperative versus competitive. The top seven items which were all above 5.5 showed a very positive and perhaps unusual emphasis with respectful at the top, honest second and friendly third. Note the oriental influence at work here especially with the items such as respectful, honest, polite, dependable and smart. These students had a positive self image according to these items.

Their ideals were even higher with 22 items above 4.99. Only two items rated below 4: one was calm as opposed to excitable at 3.79 and the lowest was humorous as opposed to serious at 3.44. Their five highest ideals were hardworking, smart, happy, friendly and honest in that order. Although hardworking was their highest priority it did not appear in the top fourteen on self concept. They had reached their other ideals except for brave, careful, popular and free.

The following table reveals what stereotypes these students held about Koreans and whites.

Table 2 Highest Means on Items above 4.99 for All Respondents on Koreans and Whites

KOREANS		WHITES	
Items	M	Items	M
smart	5.61	popular	5.57
honest	5.52	urban	5.41
hardworking	5.36	free	5.32
friendly	5.27	excitable	5.22
motivated	5.15	happy	5.18
urban	5.09		
brave	5.08		
happy	5.07		
strong	5.02		

Table 2 shows that there were only 9 items rated above 4.99 for Koreans but even less for whites with only 5 items. These students believed that Koreans are smart, honest, hardworking, friendly, motivated, etc. It is interesting that they had hardworking and brave as ideals and believed that Koreans were hardworking and brave but they did not rate themselves as having these attributes.

Whites were rated the lowest of the four concepts but they were seen as popular, urban, free, excitable and happy. These students rated popularity as an ideal but this item did not appear for Koreans nor for themselves. Urban appeared for all but was not in the first fourteen ideals. Free was an ideal but was attained only by whites. Excitable was not an ideal and only the whites had this attribute. Happy was an item that appeared on all the lists for all the concepts and seemed to indicate the state of these students generally. They had many oriental ideals and stereotypes but were also adding on some American attributes such as popular, urban, free and happy.

These students indicated a strong positive self concept as the items on the semantic differential showed and they exhibited high ideals (94% intended to go to college). Their highest ideal was to be hardworking. Some were forgetting their language but most were holding on to their Korean heritage. They seemed to accept what was American especially the educational advantages of the United States, the benefits of citizenship, the media and entertainment. They had established many friendships. They were happy in the United States as they stated in the semantic differential. They were truly bicultural.

Conclusion

When most people speak of assimilation they usually mean acculturation or cultural assimilation but not social or structural assimilation. Cultural assimilation in the United States implies complete acceptance of the American culture and language and the rejection of the ethnic culture and language. This is a negative and dysfunctional reaction to take for an immigrant. A person who has no past, has no identity and soon becomes a problem to society. People who recommend that immigrants should forget about their culture and their past are setting these people up for failure. People who have rejected the native culture to become completely Americanized soon find out that being American is not automatic. Many people will never accept them as American, especially if they look different no matter how acculturated they are. They will then realize that they have rejected their own culture and people only to be rejected by white Americans. They now are nothing. They are not what they used to be and they are not Americans. This is a terrible situation and will bring on the negative marginal characteristics so often described in the literature. The choosing of one culture over another requires the rejection of one culture for another. This is a negative way of being acculturated and seems likely to bring on negative marginality.

Biculturalism, on the other hand, instead of choosing one or the other embraces both cultures or both groups. It does not involve the negative process of rejection but the positive process of acceptance. It may very well be this openness or acceptance to different cultures as opposed to the closed or nonacceptance of other cultures which explains the different kinds of reactions to the acculturation process.

The bicultural students in this study were good students with high scores in tests in the American schools, had English speaking friends, were well accepted by the American students and felt comfortable with them, spoke both languages fluently, were deeply interested in their native culture and history, were interested in their future and a good college education and had a positive outlook upon themselves. Biculturalism as practiced by the Korean-American high school students in Aurora seems to be a better approach than monoculturalism for acculturation since it is usually accompanied by positive outcomes and positive self concept.

References

Berry, John W. 1980a. "Acculturation as Varieties of Adaptation." Acculturation: Theory, Models and Some New Findings. Ed. Amado M. Padilla. Boulder: Westview Press.

---. 1980b. "Social and Cultural Change." Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology. Vol. 5. Eds. Harry C. Triandis and Richard W. Brislin. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Child, Irvin L. 1943. Italian or American? The Second Generation in Conflict. New Haven: Yale UP.

Clark, Margaret, Sharon Kaufman and Robert C. Pierce. 1976. "Explorations of Acculturation: Toward a Model of Ethnic Identity.: Human Organization. 35:231-238.

Cummins, James. 1984. Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy. San Diego: College-Hill Press.

Dohrenwend, B.P. and R.J. Smith. 1962. "Toward a Theory of Acculturation." Southwestern Journal of Anthropology. 18:30-39

Gardner, Robert C., Wallace E. Lambert. 1972. Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Learning. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers.

Golden, John G. 1987. Acculturation, Biculturalism and Marginality: A Study of Korean-American High Schools Students. Diss., U of Colorado, Boulder.

Gordon, Milton M. 1964. Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins. New York: Oxford UP.

Herskovits, Melville J. 1938. Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact. Gloucester: Peter Smith.

Hurh, Won Moo. 1980. "Toward a Korean-American Ethnicity: Some Theoretical Models." Ethnic and Racial Studies. 3:444-464.

Hurh, Won Moo and Kwang Chung Kim. 1984. "Adhesive Sociocultural Adaptation of Korean Immigrants in the U.S. An Alternative
Strategy of Minority Adaptation." International Migration Review. 18:188-216.

Kim, Bok-Lim C. 1980. The Future of Korean American Children and Youth: Marginality, Biculturality, and the Role of the American Public School. Washington: National Institution of Education. ERIC ED 211 647.

Lin, Jenn-Shann and L. Marckworth Standford. 1983. "The Acculturation of Chinese in North Amereica: A Sociolinguistic Profile of an Advantaged Minority Group in Edmonton." Bilingual Review. 10:47-51.

Linton, Ralph. 1940. "The Distinctive Aspects of Acculturation." The Emergent Native American. Ed. Deward E. Walker, Jr. 1972. Boston: Little, Brown and Co. 6-19.

McFee, Malcolm. 1968. "The 150% Man, A Product of Blackfeet Acculturation." American Anthropologist. 70:1096-1103.

---. 1972. Modern Blackfeet: Montanans on a Reservation. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Newman, William M. 1973. American Pluralism: A Study of Minority Groups and Social Theory. New York: Harper and Row.

Osgood, Charles E., George J. Suci and Percy H. Tannenbaum. 1957. The Measurement of Meaning. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Padilla, Amado M., Ed. 1980. "The Role of Cultural Awareness and Ethnic Loyalty in Acculturation." Acculturation: Theory, Models and Some New Findings. Ed. Amado M. Padilla. 1980. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Social Science Research Council. 1954. "Acculturation: An Exploratory Formulation." The Emergent Native American. Ed. Deward E. Walker. Jr. 1972. Boston: Little, Brown and Co. 19-43.

Spindler, George D. and Louise S. Spindler. 1957. "American Indian Personality Types and Their Sociocultural Roots." The Emergent Native American. Ed. Deward E. Wlaker, Jr. 1972. Boston: Little, Brown and Co. 502-513.

Stonequist, Everett V. 1937. The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc.

Szapocznik, Jose and William Kurtines. 1980. "Acculturation, Biculturalism and Adjustment Among Cuban Americans." Acculturation: Theory, Models and Some New Findings. Ed. Amado m. Padilla. Boulder: Westview Press.

Toffler, Alvin. 1980. The Third Wave. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

Ventriglia, Linda. 1982. Conversations of Miguel and Maria: How Children Learn a Second Language. Reading:Addison Wesley.